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THE FULFILMENT OF THE LAW.

D. J. BOLTON.

IT IS curious to find, in spite of all that has been written and thought on the subject, how far we still appear to be from realising the true nature of the inevitability of war.

We have been ready enough to blame God in the matter—to believe that war is bound to arise because of some defect in human nature (and especially foreign human nature), some flaw for which we are not responsible but from which we must always suffer. Or we are prepared to believe that this particular war “had to come” as though it were the arbitrary will of some relentless deity—careless of mankind. What we are not ready to do is to blame ourselves—to see the war as the natural consequence of disobedience to law, as the inevitable result of a consistent policy on the part of each one of us.

Just as in the *Titanic* disaster we have praised (and rightly) the heroism of the victims, and have been ready enough to curse the fate that decreed so monstrous an accident, but have failed to realise that if ships make a practice of establishing speed records when icebergs are known to be present, the laws of probability will ensure that sooner or later an accident will occur.

Chance may settle the time and place, and determine which particular rash boat and rudderless iceberg shall come into collision. In our present case, had an assassin’s pistol misfired we might still be at peace. Conversely the history of our recent war scares shows how often and with how many different nations have we nearly been at war. But though chance provides the scenery and settles the details it is we who supply the motive of the piece, and neither an overcrowded world, a malignant fate, nor a malicious enemy has brought this war upon us. It is the natural and inevitable result of the policy of us all, deliber-

ate or unconscious, and the same set of actions will give the same results just as often as we care to repeat the experiment. There is as much room on the earth for Germany and England as there was on the ocean for the iceberg and the *Titanic*: it was *the paths they pursued* that led to the collision.

Naturally in a world so small and with man's energy and capacity so vast and so rapidly extending, there will always be abundant *occasion* for quarrel, and at times some nation pursues so rudderless a course that an accident seems wellnigh invited. But, though we have still much to learn and many delicate instruments to perfect, already we know fairly well how collisions may be avoided, and similarly the science of human conduct is enabling us to see that whilst there will always be occasions for war there will never be *reasons* because the real interests of all peoples are the same.

The laws of human nature are neither so obvious nor perhaps individually so invariable as the laws of physics but they are equally certain, waiting only for us to discover and profit by them. At present mankind is simply hitting its head against the stone wall of these laws, and it will continue to hurt itself until it learns and puts itself in line, instead of disobeying or neglecting them. Philosophers and prophets of all religions and schools of thought have testified to the things which belong unto man's peace and well-being, but mankind has generally refused to learn in any but the hard school of experience. Thus the early Hebrew laws were full of minute directions as to cleanliness in matters of food, etc., they commanded one day's rest in seven, and they also inculcated honesty and fair dealing. Let us see how these various principles have come to be obeyed.

The law of cleanliness was certainly not learnt from the sacred books, in fact religion here has seemed to act more as a soporific. For countless ages men have suffered from plagues and scourges innumerable, and in agony and contrition have lifted up hands of prayer to the various gods

and demons who inspired their hopes and fears. But it was not until the common-places of cleanliness and hygiene came to be practised that relief was granted. The plagues came to punish the people for their sins, truly enough—but the sin was simply ignorance of physical laws and the punishment was automatic and inevitable.

The law of Sunday observance, expressed by Moses as a divine command, seems at first sight a very unnatural and self-denying ordinance. Small likelihood this of appealing to hard-headed slave owners and business kings that their men should work only six days a week instead of seven. Yet, ridiculous though it may appear, the law is true. Even on a purely material basis it *works*, and we practise it chiefly because we have discovered that more work and better can be got out of a man (because he *is* a man and not a mere machine) in six days than in seven, just as more work is done under liberty than under slavery.

With the principle of honesty and fair dealing the case is very similar. Our remote ancestors would never think of bartering their goods for those of another man if they could get them by knocking him on the head and running off with them. Consequently these people carried on a precarious existence, barely able to keep the race alive. Why do we now conduct business by quotations, cheques, and bills of exchange—in fact on a basis of honesty and trust? Not because there are a few policemen about, but because there is a general agreement to deal honestly. We have advanced simply in the knowledge that honesty actually is the best policy. It is a law of human nature that one gets more out of a man in the long run by treating him fairly than by doing him down. We might have learnt this from Moses or Plato: actually we have chiefly realised it through hard experience—by trying the opposite and finding it not to work.

Now come to the case in point. The fundamental law that Christ enunciated, as true and necessary for man's well-being as the laws of physics and hygiene, is that there is an underlying kinship between man and man, and that

trust and co-operation between men lead to life more abundant just as their opposites lead to death. He put it that we *ought* to love one another. Another way of stating it is that we *must* or we shall be punished for it, just as certainly and just as automatically as if we disobey the law of gravity. This principle may appear silly or unmanly, or even unfair; the point is it is *true*. To forgive one's enemies may seem an unreasonable thing to do, but no one can call it unpractical—it works, whilst its opposite does not.

The first attempts at justice were based on the idea of absolute equity—nothing could seem fairer than an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Yet the whole history of attempts to carry this out—private vengeance, family feuds and vendettas, down to our present-day reprisals, with their absurd competition in horrors,—shows that this spirit never has and never will cure the trouble, but that it simply creates a growing heritage of hatred and retaliation until no one knows or cares who was the first offender.

This law of love is not an abstract moral principle requiring force or co-operation on our part to put it into action. It always has and always will operate (whilst human nature remains what it is), and it is for us as a community to say whether we will put ourselves in line with it and live or disobey it and die. Newton did not invent the law of gravity or assist its action in any way—he merely pointed it out to us. So Christ in expounding to us this most vital of God's laws—the primal sympathy, which having been must ever be—was the greatest of that immense cloud of witnesses—poets, philosophers, and scientists—whose testimony we neglect at our peril. The ethics of the New Testament is not true because Christ said it—Christ said it because it is true.

Moreover all of these principles judge us by our actions rather than our motives, and whilst they apply to man as an individual they apply still more to man collectively. Individually there may be considerable injustice but socially the justice is absolute—if the community disobeys (whether

through ignorance, vice, or mere apathy) the community will suffer, innocent with guilty. Indeed it may be the ardent slum reformer who is the first to die of scarlet fever, or Newton himself who falls over a precipice. And it is equally certain that excellence of motive does nothing whatever to diminish the harmfulness of shrapnel.

For years we and all other European nations have been disobeying this first of laws, and now we are suffering the consequences. We did not openly quarrel with our neighbours; we were quite willing to trade with them, but at the back of our minds there was still hatred, suspicion, or at least apathy. There is no need to search through White Papers to find the cause of the trouble: our fleet is the measure of our distrust of Germany, her army that of her distrust of her neighbours, and it is these feelings which have given us the war.

Trust and co-operation as a basis for human conduct probably originated in the family: then it was extended to the clan or tribe, sworn to peace among its members and enmity to all other clans. From these societies have been built up our present states in which it would be an unthinkable anomaly for (say) Liverpool and Manchester, whilst trading and making money out of each other, to buy bigger and bigger guns to train on each other's houses and stock exchanges. How long will it be before we carry the same logical *recognition* of interdependence and mutual profitableness into our relations with foreign powers? We shall never have lasting peace until we do.

An excellent example of false psychology in this matter is Admiral Fisher's dictum, quoted in "The Great Illusion":

The supremacy of the British Navy is the best security for the peace of the World. . . . If you rub it in, both at home and abroad, that you are ready for instant war, with every unit of your strength in the first line and waiting to be first in, and hit your enemy in the belly and kick him when he is down, and boil your prisoners in oil (if you take any), and torture his women and children, then people will keep clear of you.

Now this saying is not merely immoral, it is *wrong*—totally untrue to the facts of human nature. The fallacy of peace

through over-awing is based on the assumption that the other man is fundamentally a coward, but when it comes to the point you find that he hardly ever *is* a coward. In fact he turns out to be a man very much like yourself—rather too lazy to think very hard, ready to be perfectly friendly if you start by trusting him and treating him fairly, but developing an astonishing degree of pugnacity the moment you talk about “hitting him in the belly.” What is not so easy to see is that arms are in all cases a menace and not a protection and that the weapon a man gets to protect himself constitutes the only reason why the other man has to arm *himself* and *vice versa*. But no pacifism or internationalism, no vague inter-state sympathy is of the slightest use whilst it tolerates in any form military preparedness—that open flouting and contradiction of all good feeling. German social democracy has shown very clearly that a society which supports the army in time of peace cannot hope to stand up against the fervid emotional appeal of a sudden declaration of war, for whatever object. They are bound to follow the army they have permitted to exist.

Practically all modern wars are wars of defence, directly or indirectly. In this case the immediate cause of Germany setting in motion her military machine was the fact that Russia was mobilising on the German frontier. For years the German people had been taught to fear the Russian menace, and they had developed a special plan of campaign to resist the very combination that now seemed about to attack them. This is what their army was for—is it surprising that they used it? And from their point of view have not events appeared most amply to justify them in believing that the existence of the country was at stake and that they took the only possible course to preserve it?

There is no need at this time to state that we did not fight to defend the neutrality of Belgium, that in fact this is the war we so narrowly escaped in the summer of 1911 (over Morocco) when we were legally in the wrong very much as Germany is now, and without her excuse of vital military necessity. But it is important for us not to be

obsessed by the unquestionable atrocities on the part of German regulars in those first mad rushes, and by the deliberate thoroughness of the German mind (in war as in peace), into forgetting that the German soldier is primarily a human being, who has left home and friends to risk his life for *exactly* the same reasons as our men have; a being with the same fundamentally right instincts and the same lamentable lack of imagination and common sense. They are more militarised than we, simply because their army, unlike our fleet, requires a large slice of the nation to man it.

The common people of all countries know well enough that they cannot possibly gain one tenth of what they will lose in any war, however successful. The leaders may have imperialistic aims, and the profitters behind them are glad enough of war, but the people themselves will never support it unless they are filled with moral indignation, fear, or conviction of direst necessity; and while armaments exist it will always be possible for these feelings to be aroused.

If one is met by the remark: "I agree with your general principle—appeal always to the highest there is—but I believe the Germans to be altogether an inferior race of beings, amenable only to the law of the jungle"—one can only reply that as the German race cannot be wiped out like a race of tigers, nor converted into humans by being treated as tigers, you and the Germans who think similarly will have to go on battering and being battered until you discover that Christianity provides the *only* working basis whereby you can all inhabit the same globe.

Disarmament is not "Utopian," it is the only practical politics, and we shall have war just so long as we prepare for it and no longer; peace just so soon as we are ready to trust our fellow men and show our trust. We may learn this law from Christianity, but it is more likely that only through bitter experience will realisation come. We might learn through this war or it may take a thousand such. Indeed, so fast has our knowledge of matter and

how to harness it (particularly for purposes of destruction) raced ahead of our knowledge of man and how he may be harnessed, that it is quite conceivable that the nations may almost wipe themselves out before they learn how to live peaceably together.

But history gives us better hope than this: even in the short portion of man's total existence represented by written records (say from the time of Cain up to the present day) we have succeeded in extending the area of mutual trust considerably beyond the limits of the family. In the course of man's physical evolution, he has developed from a predatory "solo" animal into a social being, more and more finding himself drawn into leagues and associations with his fellows. Many of the old unsocial virtues (by which alone at one time he kept himself alive) still persist, to form the "original sin" of the newer man, but gradually we are realising them for what they are, archaic survivals which do not fit into the present scheme of things, and gradually we are overcoming them. In some parts of the earth men carry revolvers for "self protection" and consequently these are among the least safe places in which to live. If you suggested to an inhabitant that his life might conceivably be more respected if he dropped his weapon, he would think it just as impossible as does a French gentleman to protect his "honour" other than by the duel. Yet history shows us that somehow or other, and in spite of many set-backs, we are developing a very considerable degree of mutual confidence, revolvers are dropping out of private life, vendettas and "clutching hand" gangs are being relegated to the cinema world, and we find it safer even not to arm our policemen!

A parallel which is particularly interesting because the results are so immediately discernible, is afforded by the proposed trade war which is to follow this present conflict (once "the war to *end* war"). To cherish hatred and revenge is immoral because it destroys—narrowing first the mind and spirit, and ultimately working itself out in death to both body and soul. Often the wages of sin do not

seem to be paid very promptly, or to quite the right individual, but in the case of trade, the results are immediate. Trust and an absence of restrictions are its very life blood—restrict the flow and you at once feel the pinch, prices go up and scarcity results. It may be long before we realise how, spiritually, we are members one of another, but we shall very soon find out that revenge is not good business. Incidentally what a pitiful come-down it is from our first early enthusiasm. What supreme dishonour to those who have freely given their lives in the hope of a sweeter and better Europe, that for the private gain of a few merchants we should now seek to perpetuate the evil spirits which now prevail.

Probably the foregoing remarks will be met by the following comment: "It is all very well to theorise and to say what must be, but given things as they are—we having consistently followed the armament policy and the Germans now actually advancing upon us or our allies—what can we do but fight? Would you have us at this stage reverse all our policy and try unarmed Christianity upon the oncoming hordes?" Is it possible that non-resistance would work if suddenly adopted by one nation only—that it is possible even in the individual case to overcome evil not with more evil, bigger guns, but with good?

It is easy to see how much better off Belgium would be had she had no army or armed civilians, but let us imagine for a moment the Germans landing here and finding a nation united in its determination not to resist by force of arms. They would doubtless start by killing and burning in quite the approved way, but would they keep it up very long? Would not even their most militarised of leaders see the uselessness of fighting men who had the courage not to fight back, who even seemed ready to show them kindness, while the rank and file would soon be exchanging cigarettes with their "enemies" as they did across the trenches one Christmas. The victorious march on London would be a fiasco, leaving not the slightest thread of justification for the plea of military necessity.

Imagine them then arrived in London, with their evil feelings towards us still rampant, determined to rob us and enslave us. But how could they possibly enslave a nation who did not even fear death at their hands? A mere handful of conscientious objectors have recently shown themselves un-coercible by the whole force of the British army backed by public opinion and with unlimited power to kill (or even to torture), and the Germans would discover that they could do nothing whatever but leave us alone to go on governing ourselves exactly as before. Slavery is primarily a mental condition, and our experience of labour strikes shows that with quite a moderate degree of combination and determination man's power to refuse his labour and his obedience is absolute.

But our money they might take—not our gold deposit, for that would upset their own trade—nor any of those securities (making up the immense majority of our total wealth) which depend for their value upon our labour, for that we could refuse. In fact they could take all of that portable or corruptible property (such as plate and trinkets) that “treasure upon earth” the storing up of which is condemned by Christianity and socialism alike.

In the last resort the pacifist (like the soldier) must be prepared to lose everything that *can* be taken from him—property or life—if he is to defend for the community those immaterial treasures, skill, faculties, beliefs, which are really his, beyond the reach of moth, rust or thief. It is when man is not prepared to risk his life for these things but sets out to save his life (by force of arms) that he himself squanders these priceless possessions, and loses his own life also.

Without going into further details it at least seems possible that even in the most extreme case Christianity would defend us with only a fraction of our present loss, in men and money, in addition to ending war once and for all. But let us now leave hypotheses and review briefly what actually has happened as the result of our non-Christian policy. We aimed at destroying Prussian mili-

tarism, at preserving the liberties of Europe and finally at protecting ourselves and our allies. What has been our success so far?

Before the war, in all countries, men were calling for release from grievous military burdens; in France dissatisfaction was acute, in England we were more and more grudging the ever increasing navy bill whilst our little army was openly treated as a relic of the past. In Germany thousands had emigrated for no other reason and many more were loud in their criticism—but undoubtedly the majority believed too much in physical force, and so we set out to remove that belief, by means of more force!

The result in the first place is that we have completely proved the German militarist's case. All that her worst jingoes have urged we have shown to be necessary. The bogey her people have been frightened with, that encircling union of enemy powers, has actually come into being, and consequently her army has been enormously strengthened in popular estimation. The people point to it as having saved their national existence, and even were it hopelessly beaten and foreigners in Berlin, they would still say "we were right to believe in force, in our army, but—we ought to have had a bigger army and more guns."

Meanwhile in preparing the homeopathic remedy for Germany we ourselves have become infected: France is remembering that she was once a great military nation, whilst in England not only have we raised a huge army but everyone in the country, from the youngest boy scout to the oldest bishop can think of nothing but manning the trenches and feeding the guns. Perhaps the most disquieting sign of all, because in no sense a temporary measure, is the increase of armaments already put in hand by several of the neutral states.

With militarism rampant it is not surprising to find the liberties of Europe disappearing one by one. The defence of the realm is more important than the defence of freedom, munitions and not trade unions are the working man's

business, and of course we are getting too poor to feed school children or keep museums open. Worst of all is the awful spirit which is well-nigh universal; one and all we seem to be losing every feeling of pity and respect. Our only wish is to smash, to destroy, though it means destroying all that is brave and noble in our opponents and ourselves. Surely war is the very infection of hatred.

But we are told, though all the spiritual aims of the war are unfulfilled, we have at least the physical benefits. Though our militarism may not convert the Germans or cure a suffering world of its trouble, it does at least give us temporary protection. But in what way exactly is it protecting us when we are sending out the cream of the country to be shot, spending our wealth and mortgaging our future to a colossal extent, and deflecting the whole course of our thought and energy from productive to destructive channels? Neither our army nor Germany's have done the least that was claimed for them, for both nations are bleeding to death on the battlefields of Flanders.

The present state of things shows the absolute and complete bankruptcy of every single alternative to the Christian method. For years we had feverish preparations, the opposing piles of armaments growing higher and higher, making a breakdown daily more probable and its results more disastrous. Then crisis after crisis and finally the inevitable smash, drawing in one after another of the European nations, whilst the remaining neutrals shiver on the brink, never knowing when it may be their turn.

If one thinks of it individually, of a friend who goes out and gets killed, in place of a useful life he leaves a host of vain regrets and thoughts of revenge; or if he shoots instead of being shot the effect is the same but takes place in Germany instead of England. Multiply this by a million or two until finally a peace is made that humiliates some nations and fills others with vaingloriousness but all with the determination to start building and training again. Where is it leading us to? What possible result can there be from all this hatred and war but more hatred

and preparation for more war? Willy-nilly we shall *have* to try Christianity—there is nothing else for it!

For the pacifist who realises these facts the duty is not an easy one; he cannot fight, but it is less easy to say what he can do. He is like a Londoner in the time of the great fire, able to do little in the way of putting it out, yet hesitating to pose as a lecturer on the wickedness of narrow streets and wooden houses. If the fire comes his way he must bear the penalty with the rest, but at least he can avoid himself adding to the flames.

The disciple of this newer Christianity—reached, that is, through no wholesale acceptance of Gospel teaching—will need in a supreme degree faith, courage, and intellect. Faith in humanity, in man, however debased, as holding some spark of the Divine; courage to appeal to this at whatever personal cost; and above all intellect and imagination to piece together the myriad facts of life and experience into a constructive and intelligible belief, so strong that no gusts of passion or blind emotion will have power to sweep it away.

And if no immediate action seems possible, we can at least see that we do nothing to hinder the change of spirit which has got to come. Let us remember that when we subscribe to a loan “to help crush the Germans,” when we urge our men to “pay them out” for Ypres, whenever we idly repeat the slogan “In time of peace prepare for war,” we are making ourselves responsible for the war, we are doing our bit to crucify our fellow men.

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